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Irwin, Eunice L., "MI 715 Contextual Theology" (2002). *Syllabi*. Book 2331.
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Contextual Theology

MI 715 Spring 2002

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Course Description:

A study of the way local communities and culture groups receive the Christian faith, apply its message to their life contexts, and voice its relevance through writings and traditions. The course also will consider roles and methods of the persons who participate in contextualizing theology, including those who contribute from the outside. Areas of special focus will be: Theological approaches and disciplinary rationales for doing contextual theology; models and criteria for contextual theologies; understanding how to respond to multiple expressions of the Christian faith within the one worldwide church, and; case studies in contextual theology.

Course Objectives:

1. To understand differences of assumption and method between classical theology and contextual theology, and the relationship of these to one another.
2. To examine current models for doing contextual theology and understand the specific disciplinary approaches these bring to the task.
3. To develop skills in exegeting the context in order to encourage theological response.
4. To introduce some of the theologies prevalent in the Third World (as well as among minority populations in Europe and North America), recognizing various contextual factors present within the regions and situations.
5. To establish biblical and theological criteria for evaluating contextual theologies.
6. To assist students to value emerging cross-cultural and multicultural theologies; and to help them discern and respond positively to many of the local expressions of Christian theology in the worldwide church.

Course Requirements:

1. **Interaction-Reflection Papers** (2 pages each) on **seven** articles or chapters. These are noted in the syllabus and **due** on the dates assigned. (25%)
2. **Book Review** (10-15 pages) of a contemporary example of a contextualized theology for a local group or specific culture. Describe how the theology came to be formed--its necessity and development. Evaluate its content on the basis of the models and criteria taught in the class. (Select a book from the list "fourth required reading" below.)
Due March 21st. (25%)
3. **Take-Home Exam** (Over Bevans and parts of Schreiter)
Date distributed: March 28
Date due: April 18 (20%)

4. **Term Projects** (20-30 pages) to be summarized as a **Class Report** with 1-2 pages of outline notes and short bibliography. Choose one of the following topics:
- a. Research study of a contextual theology developed by a cultural, or local interest group--articulating major issues addressed, methods used, and theological themes.
 - b. Research study showing the important practice of contextual theology as part of the work of Christian mission in a specific place and time.

Due May 16th (Selected ones presented 16th and 23rd). (30%)

Required Reading:

Bevans, Stephen B.

1992 *Models of Contextual Theology*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.

Grenz, Stanley J. and Roger E. Olson

1996 *Who Needs Theology? An Invitation to the Study of God*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity.

Schreiter, Robert J.

1985 *Constructing Local Theologies*. London: SCM Press.

Fourth required reading (for Book Review): Choose one of the following:

Bujo, Benezet

1998 *African Theology in its Social Context*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis.

Dyrness, William A.

1997 *The Earth is God's: A Theology of American Culture*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books.

Gutierrez, Gustavo J.

1997 [1984] *We Drink from our Own Wells*, 10th printing. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis.

Lee, Jung Young

1995 *Marginality: The Key to Multicultural Theology*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

Schreiter, Robert J.

1997 *The New Catholicity: Theology between the Global and the Local*. Maryknoll., NY: Orbis Books.

Course Schedule:

Readings from the text by Stephen Bevans is abbreviated--

B = *Models of Contextual Theology*

Readings noted for the two texts of Robert Schreiter are abbreviated--

CLT = *Constructing Local Theologies*

- 2/14 Introduction to the Course
 Topic: "Contextual Theology as a Field of Mission Studies:
 Whose Theological Perspectives are Represented?"
Classical vs Contextual Approaches to Theology
Read after class.: B, ix-10; CLT, ix-xiii
 Grenz & Olson, *Who Needs Theology?*
From now on, do assigned readings before class.
- 2/21 Topic: "Theological Method -- Balancing Scripture, Tradition and
 Spirituality within the Context"
 B, 11-22
 CLT, 1-21
Interaction paper: **Charles R. Taber, "The Limits of
 Indigenous Theology"**
- 2/28 Topic: "Local and Global Factors of Culture in Contextual Theologies"
 CLT, 22-38
Interaction paper: **William Dyrness, "Introduction" of *Learning
 About Theology from the Third World***
 Supplemental reading recommended: Dyrness, *Emerging Voices
 in Global Christian Theology*.
- 3/7 Topic: "Typologies and Models of Contextual Theology"
 "Translation Models: Criteria and Cases"
 B, 23-29, 111-12;
 B, 30-46
 Video and Discussion: *Circle of the Spirit*
 (Questions will be distributed to the class for discussion. Students will
 turn in their own responses to the questions at the end of the class discussion.)
- 3/14 Topic: "Anthropological Models: Criteria and Cases"
 B, 47-62
 CLT, 39-74
Interaction paper: **Paul Hiebert, "Critical Contextualization"**
Guest Presenter (TBA).
- 3/21 Topic: "Praxis Model of Contextual Theology: Criteria and Cases"
 "Relating to the Experience of God in History"
 B, 63-80
Class members' presentation on Liberation Theology.
Interaction paper: **Per Frostin, "The Hermeneutic of the Poor--
 the Epistemological 'Break' in Third World Theologies"**
- 3/28 **Due: Book Review**

Topic: "Synthetic Models of Contextual Theology: Criteria and Cases"
B, 81-96
CLT, 75-94
Interaction paper: **Kwok Pui-lan, "Mothers and Daughters,
Writers and Fighters"**
Distributed: Take-Home Exam

4/4 **SPRING BREAK**

4/11 Topic: "Political and Theological Criteria for Christian Identity"
"The People, Language, and the Church" -- Identity Factors
in Theologizing"
CLT, 95-121
Interaction paper: **Albert Widjaja, "Beggarly Theology: A
Search for Perspective Toward Indigenous Theology"**
Supplemental reading recommended: Kelly Brown Douglas,
The Black Christ.

4/18 Topic: "Transcendental Models of CT: Criteria and Cases"
B, 97-112
CLT, 122-158
Interaction paper: **Philip Hughes, "The Use of Actual Beliefs
in Contextualizing Theology"**
Due: Take-Home Exam

4/25 Religion" Topic: "Incipient Theologies within Popular Religion and Official
"Case Study: Popular Beliefs among Subanen Christianity"
CLT, 122-143 (review)

5/2 GUEST LECTURER: Randy Woodley, Eagles Wings Ministries
"Contextualizing Worship as a Theology of Native Americans"
[Randy has authored *Living in Color: Embracing God's Passion for
Diversity*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books.]

5/9 Topic: "Examining Christologies and the Use of Scriptures in
Contextual Theologies"
Supplemental reading recommended: Kwok, Pui Lan, *Discovering
the Bible in the Non-Biblical World*.

5/16 **Due: Term Projects!!**
Students will distribute their **Class Report handouts** on term projects.
Selected projects will be presented in class for discussion.

5/23 Class will meet during time scheduled for Final Exam.
Continuation of selected projects for class presentation and discussion.

Recommended Reading:

DeGruchy, John and Charles Villa-Vicencio, eds.

1994 *Doing Theology in Context: South African Perspectives.*
Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books.

Douglas, Kelly Brown

1994 *The Black Christ.* Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books.

Dyrness, William A.

1990 *Learning About Theology From the Third World.* Academic Books.
Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House.

1992 *Invitation to Cross-Cultural Theology.* Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

1994 *Emerging Voices in Global Christian Theology.* Grand Rapids:
Zondervan.

Hesselgrave, David J. and Edward Rommen

1989 *Contextualization: Meanings, Methods, and Models.*
Grand Rapids: Baker.

Kaufman, Gordon

1995 [1975] *An Essay on Theological Method.* Atlanta: AAR.

Kwok, Pui-Lan

1995 *Discovering the Bible in the Non-Biblical World.* Maryknoll, NY:
Orbis Books.

Levison, John R. and Priscilla Pope-Levison, eds.

1999 *Return to Babel: Global Perspectives on the Bible.* Louisville:
Westminster
John Knox Press.

Osborne, Grant

1991 *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to
Biblical Interpretation.* Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

Schreiter, Robert J.

1995 *Reconciliation: Mission and Ministry in a Changing Social Order.*
Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books.

Song, C. S.

1986 *Theology from the Womb of Asia.* Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis.

Van Engen, Charles

1996 *Mission on the Way: Issues in Mission Theology.* Grand Rapids:

Baker.

Focused readings on Theological Method:

Stanley Grenz and Roger Olson's book, *Who Needs Theology?*

"Frameworks for Analysis", pp. 127-196 of Hesselgrave and Rommen's book, *Contextualization* .

Gordon Kaufman's book, *An Essay on Theological Method*.

"Homiletics I: Contextualization," pp. 318-338 of Grant Osborne's book, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*.